



**DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH**

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**PRESS RELEASE**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**State Announces Preferred Selection of Site for New State Hospital**

**Sacramento** – The City of Coalinga in Fresno County has been selected as the preferred site for the construction of a new 1500-bed State Hospital, Stephen Mayberg, Ph.D., Director of the Department of Mental Health (DMH) announced today. The facility will be constructed adjacent to Pleasant Valley State Prison in Coalinga, and will treat persons who are deemed at risk of engaging in sexually violent predatory behavior.

"The selection of Pleasant Valley State Prison in Coalinga culminates an intensive two-year search that initially included 29 potential sites," Mayberg said. "When we started down this road we had two main requirements – the community had to want us, and we needed to build on land adjacent to an existing state prison."

Describing the construction of the new facility as a partnership venture between the state and the community, Mayberg said, "the state is in a position to provide many new jobs and services that will significantly boost other sectors of the local economy".

The hospital staff of approximately 2000 will include physicians, psychologists, pharmacists, psychiatric social workers, nurses and psychiatric technicians in addition to many other jobs that support the administration of the hospital. "The jobs will cover every wage and skill level, from administrators and clinicians to electricians and janitors," said Mayberg. "Every possible effort will be made to employ local residents," said Mayberg.

"The facility, which will cost an estimated \$365,000,000 to build, will have an annual operating budget of \$100-150 million. Additionally, the 2000-2001 budget provides \$6 million for mitigation impact on local agencies for schools and public services.

DMH is the lead agency and will administer the new hospital which, when it is completed, will be the largest in the state hospital system. The Department of Corrections will be in charge of the facility's perimeter security. The Department of General Services will oversee the construction of the project.

The department's selection of the City of Coalinga as the preferred site was based on four primary factors:

- Stronger local support.
- Lower cost of construction.
- Greater opportunity for staff recruitment and retention.
- Lesser cost to operate.

The SVP (sexually violent predator) law was enacted by the legislature in 1995. Persons committed as SVPs have been previously convicted of specified sex offenses and determined to have a diagnosed mental disorder that makes it likely that they will engage in sexually violent predatory behavior in the future. The DMH is responsible for evaluating inmates referred by the Department of Corrections, recommending persons to the courts for civil commitment, and treating court-committed SVPs. Females committed as SVPs will be treated at Patton State Hospital. Males will be treated at the new facility.

The last state hospital to be built was Atascadero State Hospital in San Luis Obispo in 1954. The 1001-bed facility provides treatment services to an all-male forensic population including over 330 SVP patients. This population will be transferred to the new state hospital when it is completed.

The preferred site was selected for purposes of focusing the Department's completion of the environmental impact report (EIR) process. The preferred site selection has been forwarded to the Legislature for approval. The final determination of a site will be made after the certification of the final EIR. Certification and the decision whether to approve the project are expected to occur late in September 2000.

The Department of Mental Health is responsible for the administration of four state hospitals (Atascadero, San Luis Obispo County - Metropolitan in Los Angeles County - Napa in Napa County - Patton in San Bernardino) and an Acute Psychiatric Program at the California Medical Facility, Vacaville. The hospitals provide treatment and care to over 4200 patients who are civilly committed from county mental health programs and Judicially Committed Penal Code (forensic) patients from the courts. The majority of patients in all facilities are forensic patients. The increase in the number of forensic patients and SVPs prompted the need to develop additional bed space to treat these populations.

The other competing site was Centinela State Prison in Imperial County.